

COMMENTARY

WHAT U.S. SUPPORT MEANS

Behind Washington's New Decisiveness

HAL LEHRMAN

THIS inquiry, aimed at assessing the present tendencies of United States policy on Palestine, began only one brief week-end after the Friday of President Truman's thunderbolt recognition of Israel. Permanent officialdom in Washington was still rocking under the blow. The Security

Council had just commenced juggling the hot Palestine problem again after catching it from a despondent, frustrated, and departed General Assembly. It was a moment when anything might happen, and nobody in Lake Success or Washington, however highly placed, could safely predict what it would be.

WHEN President Truman recognized the new state of Israel, observers of American policy on Palestine—as well as American delegates to the United Nations—had reason to feel somewhat bewildered. Did this new reversal of American policy represent a complete swing of the pendulum back to its original pro-partition views? Or was it a temporary tactic—and to what end? Or did it mean that at last a sharply-defined American policy had been forged in Washington? In an attempt to get an objective and authoritative answer to these questions, we asked HAL LEHRMAN to go to Washington and make an on-the-spot inquiry. A previous investigation by Mr. Lehrman—"Partition in Washington: An Inquiry" in the March COMMENTARY—written at another critical juncture in the Palestine situation, had its analysis confirmed by events, and has been widely praised as a noteworthy contribution to an understanding of American Palestine policy. Mr. Lehrman has written widely on the Near East and Europe for COMMENTARY and other periodicals. His recent book, *Russia's Europe* (Appleton-Century), analyzes the postwar destinies of the Soviet-dominated countries of Europe. He was born in New York in 1911 and attended Cornell University.

Nevertheless, certain persons who competently reflect the attitudes and intentions of various branches of the government showed this reporter their usual generous courtesy—in exchange for his usual guarantee of confidence. From these conversations there emerged two salient conclusions: that the White House had regained its initiative in policy-making on Palestine; that, so far as official United States policy was concerned, the newly-born state of Israel was in the Middle East to stay.

I am aware of the perils of prophecy—especially about Palestine and American behavior thereon. Washington had wavered before, and could waver again. Moreover, the United States was not performing in a vacuum but needed to obtain consent from at least six of the ten other Security Council members, each of which entertained its own peculiar definition of peace in the Middle East. Finally, it was conceivable that swift developments on battlefields in Lake Success and Palestine might render this article

out-of-date or obvious (or downright silly) before it achieved print. But I think it legitimate, if perhaps only for the record, to note here what seemed to be American policy as ascertainable at the given moment, and what results were likely to ensue from that policy.

IT APPEARED, then, that in the middle of May the United States had entered a new and aggressive period of decision concerning Palestine. In this phase, all American calculations for the Middle East would take into account the fact that a Jewish state existed, and would strive to avoid action (or lack of action) that might jeopardize that state's survival. If the mood of May endured, and if the United States held resolutely to its freshly-charted course, the following was promised:

1. The United States, while careful to leave the way open as long as possible for Arab conciliation, would push determinedly for effective UN action to end the Holy Land war.

2. If the Arab armies persisted in the field, the United States would demand Security Council denunciation of the "breach of the peace" and "aggression."

3. If the UN could be thus galvanized into finding and stigmatizing the aggressors, the United States would call for all economic sanctions possible under the UN mechanism.

4. The United States would urge and support Security Council endorsement of arms for Israel and an arms embargo for the Arabs.

5. Should such action fail of adoption in a hesitant Security Council, the United States would at least lift its own arms embargo on the Middle East if it fell short of retaining the embargo exclusively against the Arabs.

6. The United States would back an Israeli petition for UN membership.

7. The United States would lend full assistance and facilities for transportation of immigrants from the DP camps in the American zones of Austria and Germany

across American-controlled territory toward Israel, also possibly helping to make shipping available for the Mediterranean crossing.

8. The Marshall Plan being restricted to European countries, Israel would technically be ineligible for ERP aid. However, the United States would consider an independent loan to counteract the effects of Britain's exclusion of Palestine from the sterling bloc and to assist the young state in its first efforts toward economic stability. In this connection, the Provisional Government of Israel was already drawing up estimates to be used in applying for an American loan.

TO THE world at large, to the American people, to the UN, and, more especially, to Britain and the Arabs, the Truman administration's policy on Palestine in recent months has seemed a monument of contradiction. The Arabs in particular, when United States delegate Philip C. Jessup arose with an apologetic air in the General Assembly to announce our recognition of Israel, were choked with what was evidently, for once, a genuine feeling of outrage and despair. The tears of wrath in the eyes of Lebanese delegate Charles Malik were real. He was surely thinking that the United States had first steamrolled partition through the Assembly, then gratifyingly tabled partition in favor of trusteeship, then dropped trusteeship in favor of a mere truce, during which a "stand-still" would maintain the status quo without damage to the rights and claims of all disputants. And now here was the United States doublecrossing the Arabs and flouting the solemn assurances of its own spokesmen by acknowledging a Jewish state where none existed, by giving the Jews the ripe fruit of partition when all the time the impression had been fostered that partition was withered and dead.

But in the twilight illumination beneath which diplomacy habitually operates, one can easily confuse shadow and substance. Plain words have occult meanings, and what

seems so need not be necessarily so. In Washington I was given a "clarification."

This clarification rested on two assumptions, which, in their literal meaning, were undeniable: the United States, as a member of the UN, had to act in concert with its fellow-members; the prime duty of the UN, as affirmed and reiterated in the Charter, was to maintain peace. Accordingly, it could be demonstrated that the United States had been consistent from beginning to end, earnestly toiling inside the UN to restore tranquillity to the Holy Land. The demonstration went as follows:

Washington had supported partition, with the proviso of economic collaboration between the two independent segments of Palestine, on the strength of Unscop's recommendation that such a device was most likely to achieve lasting peace. When the Palestine Commission subsequently reported that partition could be implemented only by force, we had to take note of this deplorable fact. Nevertheless, we invited the Security Council to explore means of implementation under the Charter. This failed.

We then moved for consultation among the big powers, trying to bring the contending parties together. From March 5 to 15 we labored for a four-way settlement among the Arabs, the Jewish Agency, the British mandatory, and the Palestine Commission. This also failed.

Thereafter we could have sat still, allowing the crisis to degenerate into carnage. But it was our cardinal desire to continue exploring all channels toward peace. The President at this juncture (in defiance of domestic political consequences) courageously instructed our delegation to call for a temporary trusteeship and truce without jeopardizing the rights of any group. As Truman and Marshall both pointed out, this was not abandonment of partition but merely its postponement, to afford a cooling-off period after which the moderates on both sides might draw together. Our proposals were endorsed by the Security Council, but when a special session of the Assembly

convened to produce a practical plan—*any* plan—none was forthcoming.

Meanwhile we did what we could for peace. We strove to win Arab-Jewish acceptance of a general truce. When this collapsed, we tried to get at least a "cease-fire" agreement, down to the last possible moment before expiration of the mandate. On the final day, May 15, we obtained Assembly creation of the post of mediator.

With the mandate's lapse, and the UN's failure to establish a comparable authority, an intolerable vacuum was created. Our loyal efforts for peace had been futile. We had now to consider, in the further interests of peace, what responsible elements were available with which we might negotiate. The state of Israel, duly proclaimed, presented itself as an accomplished fact. Swift United States recognition of that state, in the absence of any other authority in the area, was logical, consistent, and imperative.

FOR any outside observer willing to accept the above theses, all the apparent confusions of Washington's performance fell neatly into a pattern of model consistency. Among other things, the theses explained why an all-Palestine trusteeship, on which the United States had once banked so heavily, was permitted to fade away.

Trusteeship had been reckoned as the last hope of the Western democracies for maintaining peace and international authority in Palestine without the participation of Soviet troops—a consideration which, while unmentioned in the UN Charter, was of signal interest to certain UN members. The "Allied and Associated Powers," which had jointly wrested Palestine and the remainder of Araby from the expiring Ottoman Empire in World War I, might have legally stepped in after the mandate with a UN trusteeship of their own exclusive membership, and left Soviet Russia sitting outside the gate. To be effective, however, trusteeship required either the consent of the inhabitants, which they seemed reluctant to grant, or a military force to persuade their consent.

This latter requirement of an international police was trusteeship's fatal flaw. Without an enforcement plan, the delegations to the General Assembly were not going to let themselves be seduced into supporting another fiasco like partition. But enforcement ran counter to official American purposes on two fronts. Trusteeship threatened to burden the United States with sole responsibility for its application, when the United States wanted only to act as *one* of many UN members—and trusteeship meant possible war, when the United States wanted only peace.

In the first place, who was going to bell the cat? The Belgians, the Brazilians, and similar small-power reservoirs for police recruitment awaited the great powers' lead. The French awaited the British lead. But the Labor government was vehemently committed to exodus from Palestine. Public opinion back home demanded that the British casualty lists be closed. It would have been political suicide for Whitehall to propose that troops were going to stay after all—unless the United States came in too, and first. So the British awaited the American lead. But the United States feared that if it committed itself on the number of men, machines, and ships it was prepared to offer, it would be invited to proceed alone.

In the second place, Washington regarded American use of force in a Palestine trusteeship as unthinkable—because it would mean using bayonets against the Jews. According to assertions which I have no means of checking, the Arabs might have been brought to accept trusteeship. What was needed for trusteeship's adoption was persuasion of the Jews—and, notably, of the Jews in the United States! An attempt at such persuasion was never made, because it was politically impossible, and because passion had carried off the masses of American Jewry. Even Hadassah, I was told, had run wild for partition. How could the Jews in Palestine then be expected not to resist the forces of trusteeship? How could American soldiers be ordered to fire on Jews?

And how, finally, could the United States preserve peace by bringing war?

The trusteeship plan, therefore, died still-born. The best that the United States would venture, in an informal working paper, was a pro rata contribution to a UN force composed of several powers—*provided that a truce were first accepted by Jews and Arabs*. In other words, we would supply our strictly limited share to the international police only if a police were not necessary! Neither the British, the French, nor anyone else offered any concrete facts and figures about military quotas. The problem never even entered the realm of practical discussion. The trusteeship idea was allowed to perish of inanition.

SUCH, at any rate, was the story given this writer in highly authoritative quarters to explain the twists and turns of United States policy between the November partition of Palestine and the May recognition of Israel. Which does not mean that there was universal rejoicing over recognition, particularly in those important sections of Washington where Middle Eastern policy had latterly been regarded as geared to the requirements of oil, strategy, and Arab friendship.

Quite the contrary. Only a few hours before Israel's recognition, there had been experimental talk about possible sanctions against the truce-resisting Jews. Mention had been made of an embargo on funds to Palestine and cancellation of tax-exempt privileges for the United Jewish Appeal—even including the Joint Distribution Committee! It is understatement to say that the President's decision to recognize Israel came as a shock to those policy advisors who were thinking such thoughts. (The fact was, however, that Warren Austin, at least, had been notified in advance.) Why was recognition so urgent, it was bitterly but sincerely asked, when we could have just as easily continued to negotiate with the *de facto* Jewish Agency? Had we ever found it so essential to recognize Transjordan? How could our word be respected in the

Middle East when we made it the football of domestic politics? How could we retain a glimmer of Arab cordiality after guaranteeing fair play and then thrusting the prize of recognition into the hands of the Jews?

Those who put such questions saw for the future a totally new orientation of our policy toward the Arab world. Henceforth we would be compelled to re-evaluate the entire concept of our national interests there. We would have to cut loose from old moorings, change old friends for new, reserve for Israel a special and favored place. As a logical consequence of the unprecedented decision to recognize Israel, we would be required to label as aggression the first proof of Arab incursion into Israeli "territory." Sanctions against the Arabs must inexorably follow. If Senator Taft had already called for stern action, how could the administration fail to outbid him? How could we dare to withhold arms from the Jews, or supply them to the Arabs?

Such were the ineluctable implications of our new line, however great the risk. For risk there certainly would be. We could not, for instance, expect to furnish weapons to one side in a battle without being considered unneutral by the other. How long would it be before the Jewish minorities—800,000 persons—in the Arab states would feel the uncontrolled fury of a *jihad*? And, for that matter, how long could safety even of Americans in the Middle East be assured? The day after recognition, plans for evacuation of Americans were taken out for fresh study under a "top-secret" classification.

YET, despite the private outcry, there was a curious lack of basic distress in those official circles where normally the recognition might have been expected to evoke the deepest anguish. Intellectually, the reaction was sharp enough; but emotionally, somehow, one sensed a kind of resignation. In part, this sprang from shrewd appraisal of the public temper, as gauged by enthusiastic press and Congressional response to the White House move. Already

painfully under fire, potential critics of recognition would hesitate to expose themselves further. In part, too, such critics were silenced by Senator Vandenberg's support of the President, a token of extraordinary bi-partisan unanimity on a hot political issue in a pre-election period. But, in addition, one heard a certain note of relief that the Arabs, thanks to American intervention, might be kept from the full test of battle—and thereby spared the risk of damaged prestige.

It would seem that the Arab fighting man was not doing as well as had been anticipated. (This was before the Anglo-Abdullah Legion had unleashed its assault on Jerusalem.) Attention was wryly directed to the possibility that Zionist propaganda had exaggerated somewhat when it was protesting that the Arabs were receiving all the arms and the Jews none. Chagrin was also expressed over such embarrassing Arab "stupidities" as the Egyptian air raids on Tel Aviv. The main point, however, was that disquieting information had apparently reached Washington about the condition of the Arab armies—reports of poor discipline, bad planning, inefficient staff work, disorganized supply, bickering among the Arab allies. Could it be that, in a real showdown, the Arab "menace" would be completely exploded? The resulting loss of face for the present rulers in the Arab world might have incalculable consequences.

Such considerations disturbed wide areas in Washington, not because of any devotion to the Arab cause but because of a genuine concern for what these areas regarded as fundamental American interests in the Middle East. Our interests required stability of power in that vital region. But Farouk was racing up Southern Palestine less to succor his Arab brethren than to get there before Abdullah, and martial law had been declared in Egypt less to mobilize the nation than to clamp a grip on the seething Wafd party. If the Cairo government, which had been shaken by a mere constabulary strike, should meet ignominious defeat in Palestine, how many more hours would that

regime last? What about Iraq, where Sunnite and Shiite were eternally at dagger's point and the Kurds an omnipresent danger? And Syria, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy? Distant Turkey and Iran, one heard, were worried about a possible Arab military rebuff at Jewish hands. That was the clue. And if Turkey and Iran were worried, Russia might find fertile ground. Defeat might bring most of the feeble Arab potentates toppling in popular upheavals. Whatever their failings, these potentates were at least dependably anti-Soviet. What would the new regimes signify? At worst, "people's governments," the kind the Russians dote on. At best, uncertainty, insecurity, troubled waters, the kind the Russians love to fish in.

Seen from this angle, a pro-Jewish trend in American policy would not be an unmitigated disaster if it compelled a "cease-fire" in Palestine, leaving the door open for the Arab effendis to retire without loss of face—and without braving the verdict of all-out battle.

OVER in the vicinity of the White House, such reasoning agreeably matched the "new look" in Palestine policy. Everybody likes to believe himself consistent, and presidential circles are no exception. Truman, it was indicated, had never regarded Arab friendship of such burning importance to our interests that it had to be favored at the expense of the Jews—and Truman had certainly never backed down on partition. The Jews had always been considered a source of pro-American strength in the Middle East. Indeed, if a choice had to be made, the United States was likely to regard Israel as a sturdier pillar than the rest of the Middle East lumped together. But, of course, such desperate choices were not necessary. The problem was simply to labor in the UN for an equitable settlement of Arab-Jewish differences, and for peace.

On the morrow of Israel's recognition, the White House atmosphere was one of serenity and satisfaction. Blended with a cautious wait-and-see note was a new over-

tone of determination. Undoubtedly this was encouraged by the nationwide reception given the President's move.

The reception should have startled nobody. It was obvious that most of American Jewry would applaud. (According to cynics, this applause was the only reason for the recognition.) It was obvious that the rank and file of Congress would approve. (Again, according to the cynics, Congress was inspired by the knowledge that there is no Arab vote in American elections.) But the cheers also came from newspaper editors, newspaper readers, and average citizens who had been sorely discomfited and perplexed by an apparent deficiency of purpose or meaning in the administration's pre-recognition somersaults. Finally, there was the intensely dramatic value of the situation: a tiny, valiant republic arising in the face of foreign invasion, against heavy odds and a sea of troubles—and a great, faraway republic leaning forward to help the fledgling Israel stand erect. The spectacle had sure-fire appeal for the American "big brother" tradition of fair play and tenderness for the underdog.

If recognition surprised everybody, it certainly surprised the Russians too. It may even be said to have mortified them, as was clear from Andrei Gromyko's prompt announcement that the "unprincipled conduct" of the United States had put the UN in a "ludicrous situation." (This correspondent can recall a somewhat similar situation, differently handled, in Budapest in 1945, when a surprise American offer to recognize the provisional Hungarian government in exchange for a guarantee of free elections was banned from the controlled Hungarian press until the Soviets could rush forth with a proclamation recognizing the same government without guarantee of free elections.) Nobody in authority denied that a desire to beat the Russians to the punch was one factor in the precipitate haste of the Truman maneuver. However, it can be reliably stated that, in the larger context of the East-West struggle, American recognition of Israel was not merely negative

and against the Soviets but positive and for the democracies.

If a Jewish state was to be recognized at all, the administration felt it to be essential that the first government to do so should be a democracy and not a totalitarian power. Soviet Russia hardly deserved such a historic claim on the gratitude of the people of Israel. Further, so I was told, initial recognition by a democracy was necessary not only for Jews in Palestine, but even more for Jews in the United States. There had been enough talk that a Jewish state would be a Kremlin creature. If Moscow had been the first to welcome Israel to statehood, the fact could (and would) have been taken by many as proof of the charge. Those who instinctively equate "Jew" with "Red" would have been able to point a finger. In this light, United States recognition was a stout blow against congenital anti-Semitism, here and abroad.

And it rendered the further service of clarifying the position of the great majority of American Jewry. The Jewish state now became a *foreign* state, one which enjoyed the friendship and esteem of the United States. No longer need any Jew be torn between allegiance to his country and despair over that country's Palestine policy. Thanks to President Truman, American Jews could henceforth be as ebullient about Israel as the Irish here are about Ireland, without placing in question their fundamental loyalty to the United States.

THIS was the mood of Washington in mid-May of 1948, while the Egyptians were announcing their arrival on Palestinian soil and the Israeli were protesting numerous violations of their frontiers. The mood was matched by the new temper of United States spokesmen at Lake Success in the oratorical days which followed. When Senator Austin smote his fist on the table and summoned the Security Council to "help keep King Abdullah where he belongs," it was a far cry from the week before, when all United States representatives had been dancing on the point of a

needle. One even heard a high American official amiably discussing in private the hitherto incredible notion of forcing the Arabs into line by stopping *our* purchases of Middle Eastern oil!

This extravagant idea obviously depended on the collaboration of the other powers in a boycott of Arab oil—a commodity at which all the world was grasping and which Western Europe needed for its economic recovery under the Marshall Plan. And the entire new turn in United States policy was dependent, for its longevity and perseverance, on too many unmeasurable factors to permit confident prediction. An abundance of snags still lay in wait for the dreams of Israel. Could the UN, which had been powerless to put an inquiry commission across the Greek-Albanian border, create a machinery for sanctions against the whole Arab world? What about the British? Two minutes of conversation with any responsible Briton would show that the views of London and Washington were never farther and more angrily apart than on the morning after Israel's recognition. Less vociferously than the Arabs, but no less firmly, the British regarded recognition as black betrayal.

To understand the British, whether or not their complex reasoning was valid, it had to be remembered that the bombing of the King David, the hanging of the sergeants, the dwindling of Britain's imperial position, and a genuine sympathy for the Arabs all contributed to give the British a perspective which was sure to make the going rough for Israel. To them, Israel was a fiction and partition a dead letter. The UN's failure to substitute a new international regime for the mandate had allowed sovereignty to devolve back on the population of Palestine, the bulk of which was Arab. If Abdullah came to the rescue of the Arab majority, how could he be called an aggressor? Indeed, was not Irgun virtually the dominant element in Zionist military councils, and did not Irgun's ambitions in Transjordan also constitute aggression, to say nothing of the slaughter

of whole Arab villages? As for Abdullah, he was Britain's equal and sovereign ally, not a treaty vassal. Britain would need long reflection before venturing to interfere with him: "It will take a great deal to persuade us to annoy Abdullah, who is about the only stable factor left in the Middle East." This reticence might even include "non-interference" if the Arab Legion should cut itself a slice of the Jewish Negev, an admirable location for military bases.

Whatever the cost to Israel, such calculations were clearly pertinent to common Anglo-American strategic interests vis-à-vis the Soviets. If Britain remained obdurate, how far would the United States go in demanding justice for Israel at the expense of unity in the world alignment against totalitarianism? And, if Britain should be forced right up to the hurdle of the veto, would she yield or would she jump?

IT WAS evident that the current policy of the United States carried no hard guarantees. On the basis of past performance, scepticism was justifiable. Until now, there had always been a chasm between fair presidential words for a Jewish Palestine on the humanitarian level and State Department hostility on the international political and long-range military level. Now that the United States was at last confronted with the imperative of direct action, would the humanitarian trend shown by every president since Wilson triumph over *Realpolitik*? Or would one see a repetition of the Labor party's tragic passage—from ardent pro-Zionism when Labor was in opposition, to unrelenting anti-Zionism when Labor mounted to power and to the responsibility of confronting Russia in the Middle East and around the world?

For those, including many sober Jews, who took the long historical view, it even seemed that recognition of Israel might ultimately be a costly gift to the Jewish homeland. A state peacefully born of partition out of trusteeship would have had special status, entitled to military protection and economic aid from the UN. But Israel,

emerging in violence and contested legality, was now free and independent. Might it not thereby have forfeited its claim to special consideration? Could there not be a washing of the hands at the UN? Could not even the United States use the recognition as a device to hold the Jewish state at arm's length and avoid commitments which would have been unavoidable under UN sponsorship? Was Israel really ready for such "independence"? Flags and stamps alone do not make a sovereign nation. The problem of hostile neighbors and a desperate economy also needed to be solved.

And even if the United States stood momentarily firm, it was asked, and Israel weathered the immediate crisis, would the Jewish state be able to grow and prosper—not just until the November elections but beyond? The Arabs might be wheedled and bludgeoned into a truce, but could they be made to accept a lasting peace and cooperation? Would conditions be favorable to the building of that genuine Jewish homeland on which world Jewry had expended so much yearning and sacrifice? Or, as Hannah Arendt has incisively warned, might not the nascent homeland shrivel into a beleaguered fortress, its culture and economy stunted by the demands of perpetual war, its garrison degenerating into a military tribe, its spirit growing alien in the isolation of battle until a new people would take form in Israel without links to the world community from which Israel had sprung?

ALL these questions and riddles harassed the minds of thoughtful men amid Jewry's general jubilation over the new note of friendship in the voice of the United States. These doubts have been set down here not as arguments but as elements in a full and objective report on the prospects of Israel. All that could be said with assurance was that, for at least this present moment in history, the hope of forthright American support never looked brighter, and at a time when such support was more needed than ever before in the long struggle for a Palestine homeland.